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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECIN](#) [EPET](#) [PINS](#) [SNAR](#) [SG](#)
SUBJECT: LOOKING AT ELECTIONS AND OIL, UN SEES UNEMPLOYMENT AS
THREAT TO REGIONAL STABILITY

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) On October 19, the six UN special representatives (UNSRs) in West Africa gathered in Dakar for their eighth meeting under the chairmanship of Ambassador Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for West Africa. They focused on Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea although they also discussed Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau, as well as regional issues. On October 20 and 21, academics, diplomats and representatives of NGOs joined the group and identified unemployment as the greatest threat to regional stability. The participants examined oil politics, governance and accountability, institutional changes, corruption, narcotics and human trafficking, and the eight national elections scheduled for 2008. Participants felt that Liberia's GEMAP could be a model. They also urged the international community to pressure ECOWAS countries to abide by election commitments. END SUMMARY.

POINTS ABOUT SPECIFIC COUNTRIES AND CONFLICTS

2. (SBU) The UNSRs examined both country-specific and regional issues, looking beyond the four countries where peace missions currently exist (Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone):

-- COTE D'IVOIRE: They expressed support for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and African Union (AU) proposals for Cote d'Ivoire and called upon Ivoirians to relaunch the peace process. They noted that the Liberia peace-keeping operation is much larger than the one in Cote d'Ivoire on a per capita basis, but the situation in Cote d'Ivoire is far more fragile.

-- LIBERIA: Turning to Liberia, they stressed satisfaction with progress on security sector reform and the Governance and Economic Management Program (GEMAP). The UNSRs highlighted job creation, reconciliation and management of expectations as key issues for the months ahead.

-- SIERRA LEONE: They focused on the pre-election environment, noting that the police have removed all roadblocks.

-- SENEGAL: The Casamance conflict has economic and cultural similarities to the conflict in Sierra Leone, and the rebels enjoy international support.

-- GUINEA-BISSAU: As for Guinea-Bissau, narcotics trafficking and strengthening intra-party democracy are the key issues.

-- GUINEA: Although there is no UNSR in Conakry, the UNDP ResRep attended the meeting and highlighted the fragility of the political and economic situation.

THREATS AND CHALLENGES TO PEACE CONSOLIDATION

13. (U) On October 20 and 21, the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and the Goree Institute broadened the meeting to include academics, diplomats and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum and Human Rights Watch. The meeting examined a number of themes: unemployment, oil politics, institutional changes, unchanging elites, electoral accountability and good governance. Participants identified unemployment as the greatest single danger to regional security and stability. They also made recommendations for the next UN Security Council session on West Africa -- planned for either January or February under the Russian or Slovak presidency.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

14. (U) Recognizing that the origins of many regional conflicts are economic, Liberia's experience with GEMAP generated considerable debate. However, a consensus emerged that West Africans must ultimately demand as much or more of their governments than outsiders.

OIL POLITICS

15. (U) Oil politics kept coming up because of Cote d'Ivoire and Mauritania's new oil wealth and the potential for it in Guinea and Guinea-Bissau. Participants strongly agreed that extractive industries need to be socially responsible and work with West African governments to ensure that mineral and petroleum wealth is shared with the people. Participants also encouraged the World Bank and IMF to share best practices, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

ELECTIONS AND ELITES

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16. (U) There was broad agreement that instability has not usually resulted in changes in leadership. In Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone, fighting has not created generational or political change, and the same actors continue to play leading roles. Before next year's eight elections, ECOWAS and the AU need to remind ECOWAS leaders that in 2001 they subscribed to a non-binding agreement that constitutional provisions governing the conduct of elections and electoral codes would not change in the six months prior to elections. (NOTE: Senegal is in clear violation. END NOTE.)

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

17. (SBU) While elites may not have changed, institutions have. The African Union in particular is far more assertive and engaged than the Organization of African Unity. In fact, the AU's position on Cote d'Ivoire -- while perhaps not what France would have hoped for -- is far stronger than it was even a year ago. However, participants cautioned that the AU is not ready to address Guinea (or Zimbabwe) because of their leaders' roles in the decolonization process. Strong presidencies also present a barrier to change.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) While the AU may be growing stronger, West Africa's elites are not changing and are not moving to address the region's problems as fast as the international community would like. Unemployment; transparency; accountability; narcotics and human trafficking; investment promotion (private-sector-led growth), and the freedom, fairness and transparency of elections are all key issues that donors, including the UN and the IFIs should continue to examine. We should indeed focus on GEMAP and on sharing best practices for managing new found oil wealth. Finally, we should hold ECOWAS members accountable for commitments concerning the conduct of elections. END COMMENT.

19. (U) Visit Embassy Dakar's classified website at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/af/dakar>.

JACOBS